Young people's languaging and social positioning. *Chaining* in "bilingual" educational settings in Sweden[☆]

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A B S T R A C T

The study presented in this paper examines languaging in a "bilingual" school setting. The overall aim here is to explore young people's doing of multilingualism as well as social positioning in and through the everyday social practices where literacy is salient. Anchored in perspectives that highlight the social construction of reality, and located in the geopolitical space of Sweden, this study investigates an educational setting where Swedish and Finnish are used as the primary languages of instruction but where other linguistic varieties are present. In the paper, the analytically relevant concept of chaining is empirically illustrated through the analysis of ethnographically created data. These data include video recordings of classroom interaction and materials framed within the school diary literacy practice. The chained flow of various oral, written and multimodal varieties in human meaning-making is presented as an analytical finding.

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1. Introduction

In Northern late modern societies, school arenas offer children and young people a range of opportunities for both conventional and creative usage of communicative resources related to languaging (including literacy) and learning. Participation in diverse activities and practices within formal education, which is in itself an arena for negotiating and displaying social positions (in other words identity positioning) is an important albeit sometimes implicit by-product of the institutionally framed goal of learning. For minority students attending programs that aim to promote both majority and minority language varieties in linguistically diverse contexts, this is even more the case (see e.g. Bagga-Gupta, 2013; Leung, 2005). Focusing on (i) social interactions inside and outside school environments and (ii) practices and discourses in so called multilingual educational settings both allows for a study of dimensions of language use in everyday life in schools, but furthermore for researchers interested in multilingualism and literacies to examine languaging including literacy usage in what is sometimes called identity work.

Broadly, the study presented here takes the following perspectives on learning and communication, including literacy, as points of departure. First, a socio-constructional/sociocultural perspective, based on Vygotskian thinking, that focuses human beings' communication and learning in terms of agency and active participation in social practices and activities (Säljö, 2000, 2005; Wertsch, 1985), and second, approaches to literacy, represented in the field of multilingual literacies (Bagga-Gupta, 1995, 2002, 2012a; Martin-Jones, 2009; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). The latter can be exemplified through the orientations

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labeled Literacy Studies or New Literacy Studies (NLS, e.g. Barton, 1994; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). In later works within NLS, Gee (2008) discusses the relationships between discourses and literacies, claiming that both of these comprise of group-specific representations (social languages), which in turn shape individuals' identification processes. Moreover, in terms of social positioning, a central assumption within the socio-constructional perspective is that identification processes are seen in terms of a joint social accomplishment (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Bagga-Gupta, 2012a, 2013) rather than inside the head development and people's individual characteristics.

A small but growing number of studies have illustrated the role of schools as mediators and reproducers of the common underlying ideas and values of a society (such as monolingualism), but also the discrepancy between school norms and multilingual students' social practices (cf. Bagga-Gupta, 2002, 2004b, 2012a,b; Čekaité & Evaldsson, 2008; Cromdal, 2000; Evaldsson, 2003). However, despite the growing body of research that highlights the positive effects of bilingual education in terms of developing bilingual skills and keeping language varieties alive both at the individual and societal levels (see e.g. Cummins, 2001; Gafaranga, 2007; Garcia, 2009; Grosjean, 2008; Hornberger, 2003, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Tuomela, 2001), there continues to exist a paucity of knowledge that is empirically grounded as far as issues related to language and literacy development or learning among bi- and multilingual young people in global, European and, in particular, Swedish settings. This was one of the central concerns for us when the research project DIMuL,[1] Doing Identity in and through Multilingual Literacy practices, was initiated in 2010. Project DIMuL is interested in mapping the kinds of languaging, including literacy practices, young people are engaged in both in and outside what is labeled as bilingual school settings, as well as identifying what kinds of social positions they highlight and orient toward in the course of their everyday lives inside and outside of school settings. Furthermore, the project contributes to the (in the Swedish context) rather limited body of research that deals with the so-called "forgotten" middle school years (ages 9–12) as well as provides insights concerning a large, yet sparsely documented minority group in Sweden (i.e. the Sweden Finns). The local framework with regard to the project consists of a group of preadolescents attending a school, situated in Sweden, that has an official bilingual/bicultural profile.

1.1. Aims, research questions and focus of present study

The overall aim of the present study can be formulated in terms of exploring how the participants use communicative, including literacy, resources in everyday social practices and the ways in which these interconnected practices invoke linguistic and (cultural) social positions. The specific interrelated issues attended to in the study that is reported here include:

- What types of communicative resources do young people employ in different school practices in a setting that is formally labeled bilingual education?
- How, and in what ways, are aspects of communicative repertoires (such as oracy, literacy and other semiotic resources) interrelated in these practices?
- And subsequently: In what patterned ways do social positionings become salient in everyday oral and written interactions in educational settings where more than one language variety is used?

The present study contributes to a small but growing body of research that highlights and illustrates the *doing of multilingualism* inside and outside school arenas, and furthermore connects this with multilingual literacy practices and social positioning. Thus, languaging or language use broadly, including the use of oral, written and other semiotic resources related to work done in school settings are critically discussed based upon analysis of two types of empirical data in our study. These include the micro-interactional level (based upon videotaped interactional materials of naturally occurring activities from classroom settings) and the meso level of institutionally framed literacy practices (based upon school diaries that students and teachers create over the course of a longer time unit, here, during a school week; ideally, these diaries are sent home to the parents on a weekly basis).[2] Bringing together aspects of young peoples' multilingualism, including multiliteracies, our follow-up aim is to contribute from an empirical analytical position to challenging the monolingual bias that currently dominates understandings of public as well as academic discourses.[3]

In the present study *languaging* – the dynamic and social use of different linguistic features for creating and negotiating meanings (for further elaborations of languaging, see e.g. Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Garcia, 2009; Jørgensen, 2008; Linell, 2009) – is seen as a core concept for understanding how human beings co-construct their social realities and participate in meaning-making. As a consequence, expressions of social positionings and identities are also seen as one of the major

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[1] DIMuL is a part of the Swedish National Research School *LIMCUL*, Young Peoples' Literacies, Multilingualism and Cultural Practices in Everyday Society. For more information about the research school, see http://www.oru.se/English/Education/Research-education/Research-schools/Research-schools/LIMCUL—Literacies-Multilingualism-and-Cultural-Practices-in-Present-Day-Society/.

[2] While *Author 1* (in preparation) attends to communication issues, including literacies, at three levels or scales: micro-interactional, meso activity levels (for instance practices in schools and homes) and macro societal discourse levels within project DIMuL, both authors work at all three scales in different ethnographically oriented projects within the ongoing work at the CCD research environment, see http://www.oru.se/English/Research/Research-Environments/Research-environment/HS/Culture-Communication-and-Diversity-CCDKKOM/.

[3] At least in Northern settings.